

**Board of Selectmen Statements from
8/28/06 Meeting and Vote**

E.M. Klein

Statement of Support to Form a Health District with New Canaan

Since February the Town of Darien has been studying this issue of public health more specifically whether or not to form a health district with the Town of New Canaan through the Health District Planning Committee. During these months several meetings were held outlining the responsibilities of a health district, identifying the cost of a health district, comparisons were made to part time departments and to full time departments, a public hearing was held as well as a meeting with Weston First Selectman Woody Bliss whose Town is a member of the Westport-Weston Health District.

Community expectations are that someone is looking out for their welfare. As elected officials it is our responsibility to do so. Public health is something that the public does not want to think about. It is our job as elected officials to ensure the public's health by making sure our school cafeterias and restaurants are inspected, by providing the necessary information to our residents when health threats arise such as Lyme and West Nile and by hosting flu clinics for residents of all ages.

We as a Board and as a community have had opportunity for discussion, debate and the presentation and consideration of new information. We have had opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. Tonight the Board of Selectmen is scheduled to vote on the formation of a health district with New Canaan.

SUPPORT FORMING A HEALTH DISTRICT

Does a health district support the mission of public health? The answer is yes. The mission of public health is to prevent disease and disability, promote good health by educating the public and protect the community by planning. Forming a health district with New Canaan will allow us to most importantly expand services to the community and allow us to do so in a fiscally responsible manner.

Additional reasons to support a health district:

1. Increase in services – inspections, education, planning, disease management and data collection
2. Larger and consistent role in emergency planning
3. Improved management of staff – realize efficiencies, specialization
4. Increase in funding – eligible for not only a per capita increase, but also for grants to support programs, salaries or initiatives

Paul Hendrickson: 8/28/06 Comments on Proposed Health District:

I would like to thank Town Administrator John Crary for his patience and hard work in compiling pro forma financial statements for the various health organization options the Board of Selectmen has reviewed. At this point in the process, I believe these estimates are as accurate as reasonably possible. To put things in perspective on this sensitive subject, the net cost of the various options is less than 1% of the Selectmen's budget and less than 0.25% of the total Town budget.

From the numbers alone the Full Time Health Director and Health District options provide a somewhat better financial option; however, that is not the entire equation. To date the Darien Health Department has provided strong and consistent service. Within the past week the Board of Selectmen has increased health funding as proposed by Health Director Vince Proto; as presented, this increased funding will close and eliminate the compliance gap and provide the citizens of Darien with the requisite services.

I believe that we must give this effort time to take effect and show results. Also, we must examine the mechanics of implementing any different form of Health administration in Darien and the possible dislocations associated with any such change. While I do not dismiss a Health District out-of-hand, I believe at this time we should continue with our own health department with increased funding and vigilance.

Additional Comments (in response to other Board members' statements):

In response to a statement that a Health District would spread costs: "Since 85% – 90% of health related costs are variable costs there is very limited overhead to spread."

In response to a statement that there are other items the Health Department should look at: "In last week's meeting I asked Vince Proto if Darien was within spec(ification) for all other inspections except food establishments. He said, 'Yes'. The Board addressed the food establishment inspection frequency shortfall with the increased hours funded at that meeting. If this is not the case, we need to speak with Vince again."

Darien/New Canaan Health District

The following comments about the proposed joint Darien/New Canaan Health District were made at the Board of Selectman meeting on August 28th 2006 in response to questions and concerns raised in previous meetings.

How can Darien be assured that the proposed Darien/New Canaan joint Health District will provide services of the same or better quality than a Darien-only Health Department?

- It is expected that the joint district would have offices in both Darien and New Canaan town halls so there will be no inconvenience due to distance
- The plan for the Joint District includes enough staff to do the work expected/required in both towns. By having a larger pool of Sanitarian resources, it is expected that there will be a smoothing of the workload providing a more consistent response
- By having a larger pool of Sanitarian resources there can be improved productivity and quality by providing more specialized Sanitarians
- By having a larger pool of Sanitarian resources, there can be improved response to either town in a public health emergency
- To insure equitable allocation of resources to each town, the Joint District will have a Board of Directors, three appointed by Darien Board of Selectmen and two appointed by the New Canaan Board of Selectmen
- By having a Board of Directors made up of health professionals from the town communities, the Joint Health District will have better governance than the current Darien Health Dept.
- Sanitarian and other health professionals can be contract for services, employees of the Joint District, or a combination - as needed and appropriate

What additional benefits are expected from the proposed Joint Health District?

- A shared full-time Health Director will be available to participate in regional health planning and emergency health planning
- A Health District will have priority in emergency communications from the CT Dept of Health and have priority allocation of resources such as vaccines
- Because the Joint District will share a Director, the most expensive employee, and appears to qualify for Federal and Ct public health grants, the Joint District appears to be a less expensive choice for a high level of service
- The CT Dept of Health is strongly encouraging each town to participate in regional health districts. By joining with New Canaan, Darien can retain some local control by working cooperatively with a town that is very similar to our own. We have the choice with whom we will be joined.

Is the proposed Joint health District a permanent change?

- If the Joint Health District does not work satisfactorily, it can be dissolved any time after 24 months has passed. Very few CT Health Districts have been dissolved.

In Summary: I support the Joint Health District with New Canaan because of advantages in resource management – specifically staffing efficiencies, specializations, coordination and delivery of services, oversight, evaluation, and shared responsibility and shared liability. I believe that the Joint Health District will provide the opportunity for increased services, increased planning and coordination, and increased access to funding sources. I believe it is the best way to address the complex public health issues of our times.

Barbara Thorne

Barbara Thorne 8/28/06

**Statement made by Linda Santarella
Regarding Position on Formation of Health District
Extracted from Board of Selectmen Minutes of August 28, 2006**

Ms. Santarella stated that her position was that she believed that they have a responsibility to protect the residents. She said that there has been a lot of misinformation about people's position on the health district and she tried to be objective, but she would be opposed to form a health district with anybody at this time. She stated that she was anxious to see what the RTM does.

Klein, Evonne

From: Linda Sant [lindasantarella@yahoo.com]
Sent: Tuesday, September 05, 2006 4:54 PM
To: Klein, Evonne
Subject: Health District

Dear Evonne,

I believe the following were my comments regarding the formation of a Health District with the town of New Canaan.

I stated that "We have a responsibility to protect our own Darien residents, and philosophically that is where I have been concerned from the beginning." At a number of Board of Selectmen meetings I have continued to voice this concern. Additionally I stated that "the first step in supporting Vince Proto's proposal. I believe that "it is our responsibility to take care of our town. If I were to consider partnering with another community in a Health District, New Canaan would be a town I could marry into." The only other thing I mentioned was supporting a needs assessment and I requested a monthly report from the Health Department as to how many inspections were being done.

In our conversation this morning you mentioned there are draft minutes. Please feel free to add any other comments that I made from those minutes. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call.

Linda

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**Statement made by Susan Young
Regarding Position on Formation of Health District
Extracted from Board of Selectmen Minutes of August 28, 2006**

Ms. Young stated that the reasons for forming a health district were very compelling, however saving money was not the top priority. She stated that the Town will not be denied a seat at the table either as a health district or health department for obtaining grants, however they cannot count on grants for funding positions. She continued that grants do not subsidize a health district and must be matched by municipal funds. Her greatest concern was the personnel because they now have four people with high caliber qualifications. She stated that last week they voted to increase the number of hours for the Health Department to be 100% compliant in inspections by June 2007 so they now have the quality and they will now identify the quantity. She stated that it was not necessary to turn it over to a governing body. She believed that a lot of the study had been done and she thanked Mr. Crary for the work he had done.